PALESTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM

Background and Political Considerations

Background:

As a result of hostilities in Palestine preceding and following the termination of the British Mandate and establishment of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, almost the entire Arab population of Palestine fled or was expelled from the area under Jewish occupation. These Arabs, now estimated at more than 700,000* took refuge in Arab-controlled areas of Palestine and in the neighboring Arab states. The present distribution of the refugees is approximately the following:

Lebanon	100,000 - 105,000	(an addition of 10-10.5% to the normal population)
Syria	85,000 - 100,000	(an addition of 3.5-4% to the normal population)
Transjordan	85,000	(an addition of 21% to the normal population)
Iraq	5,000	(an addition of 0.1% to the normal population)
Palestine (areas under Arab military occupation)		
North	230,000	(an addition of 77% to the normal population)
South	235,000	(an addition of 224% to the normal population)

No accurate statistical breakdown of the refugees exists. However, the International Children's Emergency Fund considers 425,000 or 58% of the refugees eligible for assistance under its program: this group consists of infants, young children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. Approximately 15% of the refugees are aged, sick, and infirm. It would appear that the able-bodied men and women amount to a maximum of 25 percent of the total, or 180,000; the able-bodied males may number not more than 100,000.

*Based on estimates of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, March 1, 1949. The total number of destitute persons now eligible for relief, including displaced persons, numbers 940,000 at the present time.

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The condition of these refugees, dependent upon their own slender resources and upon those of the neighboring states, rapidly became acute. Since the Government of Israel refused to permit repatriation of Arab refugees into Israeli territory, and since relief assistance enlisted by the United Nations Mediator for Palestine in August was wholly inadequate to meet a problem of this magnitude, the Mediator referred the problem to the General Assembly in September 1948, with a renewed appeal for assistance. This appeal was reiterated by the Acting Mediator in a report to the United Nations on October 18, 1948, in which he made recommendations for the establishment of a United Nations relief program for assistance to the refugees.

Action taken up to present:

In response to the Mediator's initial request in August for emergency supplies, the Department's only recourse, in the absence of authorized public funds, was to appeal to American voluntary agencies. As a result of this action, funds and supplies exceeding $1,650,000 have been contributed by American voluntary sources as of March 31, 1949.

On November 19, 1948, the General Assembly unanimously passed a joint US-UK-Belgian-Dutch resolution calling for a United Nations program for the relief of Palestinian refugees. This resolution declared that a sum of $32,000,000 would be required for a nine months' program, to be raised by voluntary contributions, and authorized an immediate advance of $5,000,000 from the United Nations working capital fund.

This Government granted a leave of absence to Stanton Griffis, American Ambassador to Egypt, to enable him to accept the appointment as Director of United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees.

On December 7, President Truman announced his intention of recommending to the Congress that the United States contribute 50 percent of the amount called for in the United Nations resolution, or $16,000,000. Legislation authorizing a United States contribution was signed by the President on March 24, 1949, and an advance of $8,000,000 from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation has been given to the United Nations.

The General Assembly resolution of December 11, 1948, establishing a Conciliation Commission for Palestine resolves "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible". A machinery for implementing these object-

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ives is provided by the resolution, which "instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations."

With a view to implementing the purposes of the December 11 resolution with respect to repatriation, we have made strong representation to the Israeli Government, urging them to agree to the principle of repatriation. Accordingly, we welcomed the Israeli Government's statements before the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly on May 5 and 6, 1949, indicating its agreement to the principle of repatriation and its willingness to contribute to solution of the problem. We are now urging Israel to indicate in the near future its agreement to repatriate a substantial number of refugees, and to initiate immediately the repatriation of a portion, particularly to areas outside the boundaries of Israel as defined by the General Assembly resolution of November 29, 1947, which are now under Israeli military occupation.

Since this Government recognizes that a large number of refugees will not wish to return to Israel, we are also urging the Arab states to indicate their agreement to the principle of resettlement. The British Government is undertaking parallel representations to the Arab states.

The Palestine Conciliation Commission, in its second progress report to the United Nations, recommended that Israel and the Arab states undertake a public works program which would make possible the return of the refugees and the early absorption of those not desiring to return to their homes. In the event that Israel and the Arab states should apply to the United Nations for technical and financial assistance in preparing and carrying out such a program, the Conciliation Commission expressed its willingness to recommend favorable action on such a request by the competent organs of the United Nations.

Basic assumptions with respect to the problem.

Failure to liquidate or materially reduce the magnitude of the Arab refugee problem would have important consequences. The Arab states presently represent a highly vulnerable area for Soviet

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exploitation, and the presence of over 700,000 destitute, idle refugees provides the likeliest channel for such exploitations. In addition, their continued presence will further undermine the weakened economy of the Arab states, and may well provide the motivation for the overthrow of certain of the Arab Governments. Moreover, failure to liquidate the problem would adversely affect the possibility of a permanent settlement in Palestine, and would create a permanent source of friction between Israel and the Arab states.

Conversely, speedy action looking to the equitable solution of the refugee problem would further the restoration of peace and security and contribute to the stabilization of the Near East. It would prevent the exploitation of the refugee problem by foreign interests inimical to the best interests of the peoples of the Near East.

In view of the general position of Israel towards the question of repatriation, and the large-scale preemption of Arab lands, housing and employment opportunities by Jewish immigrants, who are entering Israel at the rate of 25,000 monthly, it would be unrealistic to expect Israel to agree to the repatriation of all those so desiring. Assuming Israel is persuaded to accept any substantial number, moreover, it is probable that it will request financial assistance in carrying out their repatriation.

It is therefore assumed that as many as 500,000 refugees will have to be permanently settled in the Arab states. The Arab states, however, will be unable to accomplish the resettlement of this number without adverse economic and political repercussions, unless material assistance is forthcoming.

Finally, it can be assumed that Great Britain and France are the only major foreign powers whose degree of interest in the Near East is sufficient to insure any significant participation in the solution of the refugee problem.

United States interests in the Near East:

The Near Eastern area, consisting of Israel and the Arab states, is an area of vital strategic importance, a communications center, and a major source of petroleum. As such, it is an area of special concern to all the great powers and to certain lesser powers. During recent years our chief objective in the Near East was to prevent inherent rivalries and conflicting interests in that area from developing into conditions which might lead to a third world war.

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Because of the special significance of Palestine, the conflicting interests and aspirations of the Near East as a whole have had a primary focus in that country and, during the past year, found expression in open hostilities. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, this Government took a leading part in seeking a solution of the Palestine problem which would be acceptable to the interested parties. Since the failure of these attempts, we have been active in supporting measures designed to end the conflict, and to achieve a permanent settlement of the Palestine problem. These efforts, carried on within the framework of the United Nations, have been governed by our desire to support in the Near East the principles of the United Nations, and to put an end to the threat to international security in the Near East which the present situation represents.

In conjunction with our efforts to achieve the permanent settlement of Arab-Jewish differences with respect to Palestine, we are striving to promote the establishment of cooperative relationships between Israel and the Arab states, as a condition to the stabilization and peaceful development of the area.

On a regional basis, we wish to assist the Near Eastern countries in maintaining their independence, to strengthen their orientation towards the West, and to discourage any tendencies towards the development of authoritarian and unrepresentative forms of government. Such efforts are designed both to minimize the debilitating effects of internal discontent, and to strengthen the determination of these states to resist external pressures and intervention.

Since the stabilization of the Near East is a major objective of American foreign policy, the refugee problem, as a focal point for continued unrest within the Arab states, a source of continuing friction between Israel and the Arabs, and a likely channel for Soviet exploitation, is directly related to our national interests.

Attitudes of UN, individual governments, and the refugees toward the problem:

(a) Attitude of the UN:

Count Bernadotte, the slain Palestine Mediator, put forth the concept of UN responsibility for the Palestine refugees. In

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conclusion (G) of his report, dated September 16, in Part Three (Assistance to Refugees), he said:

"So long as large numbers of the refugees remain in distress, I believe that responsibility for their relief should be assumed by the United Nations in conjunction with the neighbouring Arab states, the Provisional Government of Israel, the specialized agencies, and also all the voluntary bodies or organizations of a humanitarian and non-political character."

However, at the Third Session of the General Assembly in Paris, the United States Delegation was careful to insist in conversations with other Delegations that there was no legal responsibility for refugee relief devolving upon the United Nations. The issue was placed before the Third Committee and the Assembly on its own merits as a question involving humanitarian as well as political elements which would have to be met on an ad hoc basis without establishing a precedent for similar United Nations action in other cases.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the refugees themselves and to greater extent in the view of the Arab Governments, the United Nations is responsible for creation of the problem and for the care of the refugees.

Subsequent to the passage of the resolution of November 19, 1948, the United Nations in the field has undertaken primary responsibility for the emergency phase of refugee relief. There is no doubt that the Secretary General, Mr. Trygve Lie, feels convinced that the United Nations must continue to show effective leadership in meeting this problem. However, in essence, the continuing participation of the United Nations in dealing with the interim and long-range phases of the matter will depend on the attitudes of the Governments who compose the United Nations.

(b) Attitudes of other UN Governments:

It was significant that when the Palestine refugee problem was

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considered by Committee 3 in Paris last autumn, support was more verbal than valuable in tangible terms. In addition to our contribution to the relief program, the British Government has contributed one million pounds; the French contribution of approximately $1,600,000 is understood to be under consideration by Parliament at the present time. Canada, Belgium, Norway, Denmark and Australia have made substantial contributions to the program. No positive commitments have yet been made by the Latin American governments. The Soviet bloc has made no reply to the UN appeals.

A considerable portion of the relief expenditure has been borne, perforce, by the Arab states. It has been estimated that from the time the first refugees fled from Haifa and Jaffa in the spring of 1948, to December 1 of that year, the Arab Governments contributed $11,000,000 in cash or kind to their sustenance, a large sum in comparison with the slender budgets of most of these Governments.

The conclusion seems inescapable that, in any program of continuing assistance formulated by the United Nations for the refugees, many of the constituent Governments could not be relied upon for significant contributions.

The United Kingdom has indicated its mounting concern over the refugee problem, as a threat to the entire stability of the strategic Near East, in which the United Kingdom has a vital interest. The British Government considers that this problem deserves the utmost efforts of the United States and United Kingdom as well as the United Nations. With a view to achieving some progress towards solution of the problem, the British Government is granting a loan to Transjordan of one million pounds for the purpose of initiating resettlement projects. The British Government is currently making available to the United States Government technical studies of development projects which could be utilized to create resettlement possibilities.

Because of its importance as a Moslem power, its traditional interest in the Near East, and its membership on the Palestine Conciliation Commission, the French Government can be counted upon to participate in the solution of the refugee problem. French officials have indicated to this Government their readiness to cooperate in the formulation of a program for the liquidation of the problem.

Turkey, as a Moslem country which maintains relations with both Israel and the Arab states, and as a member of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, could also be expected to participate actively in the solution of the refugee problem.

(c) Attitude of the Refugees themselves.

All reports from the field indicate that a majority of the refugees wish to return to their homes. It would appear that the most important category of refugees desiring repatriation is the fellahin, who for the most part would be indifferent to political considerations and would place primary emphasis upon returning to their farms or villages. The category of property owners in general desire to return principally to liquidate their holdings; some have already done so in absentia. The nationalist category for the most part would not wish to return to Israeli territory, save for those who might use their return to carry on political activities designed to oust the Israelis from Palestine.

When the refugees realize that it will be impossible for many of them to return to their homes, the political and social repercussions will be great, unless some alternative is prepared and some hope offered the refugees of an improved life in the future. If, through lack of a proper program or adequate funds, this opportunity is denied the refugees, it seems certain that the ensuing conditions of unrest and despair would provide a most fertile hotbed for the implantation of Communism and for exploitation by rightist elements.

(d) Attitude of the Arab States.

Even if present efforts to secure the agreement of the Arab states to the principle of resettlement for those refugees who do not return to Israel are successful, the Arab states would require evidence:

(1) that Israel was prepared to cooperate effectively in the liquidation of the refugee question;

(2) that substantial material assistance would be forthcoming from outside sources to aid in solving the refugee problem;

(3) that such aid would be of material benefit to their countries and population, as well as to the refugees themselves;

(4) that the administration of such aid would involve no derogation of sovereignty.

Conclusions:

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1. The disposition of the 700,000 refugees is a political issue of the highest order between Israel and the Arab states, neither of which will consider it as a refugee problem at the present time.

2. Consequently, continuing and vigorous pressure will have to be exerted upon Israel and the Arab states if their agreement to repatriation and resettlement, respectively, on the scale required, is to be secured.

3. Agreement by Israel to repatriate at least 200,000 - 250,000 refugees is considered a necessary precedent to any ultimate and satisfactory solution of the refugee problem. This is necessary in order to reduce the total to a number capable of assimilation on a self-supporting basis in the Arab countries within a reasonable time, and to provide a favorable atmosphere for assumption by the Arab states of the responsibilities involved in such resettlement. In view of the large scale preemption of Arab lands, housing, and employment possibilities in Israel, primary attention will have to be directed to securing repatriation of refugees to those formerly predominantly Arab areas now under Israeli military occupation which are outside the boundaries of the Jewish state as defined in the General Assembly resolution of November 29, 1947.

4. There has been no appreciable absorption of refugees into the existing economies of the Arab states, nor can there be under present conditions without increase in unemployment, further depression of the already low standards of living and detérioration of the political stability of the Arab states, already seriously undermined by economic problems and the recent hostilities.

5. The refugees will continue to be largely dependent for their support upon assistance from outside the Arab states, after termination of the present UNRPR program, now expected by the end of 1949. The present number of refugees cannot be supported by the Arab Governments nor by the voluntary relief organizations either within or outside the Arab states.

6. At the earliest possible date and certainly at the termination of the present UNRPR program, assistance to the refugees should wherever possible be on a work rather than a relief basis, even though the initial cost per refugee is greater. A work relief program would serve to check the present deterioration in morale among the

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refugees, and would result in accomplishment of useful work directed toward their own resettlement, toward raising the economic potential of the countries in which they are harbored, and toward a progressive reduction and eventual elimination in the need for further outside assistance.

7. Absorption of the refugees into the economies of the Arab states on a self-supporting basis can only be achieved through raising the economic potentials of the countries involved by increasing the amount or productivity of arable land, development of new industry, improvement in transportation, facilities, etcetera.

8. Overall responsibility for the refugee problem should be placed squarely on Israel and the Arab states. Any further outside assistance which is made available should be under the auspices of the United Nations. Any plan developed to deal with the refugee problem should be formulated within this context, utilizing all possible sources of assistance including interested and able UN member states, specialized agencies, related international organizations and private organizations.

9. The objective of a refugee program should be to repatriate or resettle the refugees as rapidly and economically as possible, while minimizing present and potential economic and political dislocations.

10. In order to secure the cooperation of the Arab states, any solution of the refugee problem must be formulated within the broader framework of the interests of the countries concerned. This will require full recognition of their legitimate economic development aspirations, in their own interest as well as in the interest of solving the refugee problem. Since the development projects required for solution of the refugee problem will probably absorb most of the external financing available from all sources for the Near East during the next few years, the questions of economic development and of the solution of the refugee problem are indivisible, and both must be taken fully into consideration and carefully coordinated in any overall plan which is evolved.

11. Insofar as possible, all outside assistance to the Arab states in connection with the refugee problem should be extended in response to the request of the states concerned.

May 19, 1949